

SERIOUS PESTS OF *URTICA DIVICA* LINN. AT 5500' ALTITUDE IN KUMAON HILLS IN INDIA

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URTICA DIVICA Linn. belongs to the family urticaceae and is commonly called "Bichhu" grass in the Kumaon hills. This plant is a perennial shrub and grows in fallen lands or in the crevices of retaining walls in the northern hills at an altitude of 1000-2500 metres. During August and September it blooms and young plants are eaten as vegetable and are also fed to cattle and goats as fodder grass. Aswal *et al.* (1987) has reported the biological activity of this plant as "Antiviral". Chopra *et al.* (1984) reported that through contact with the skin, stings of this plant result in minor or temporary irritation of the skin or painful irritation and inflammation with vesicles or blisters depending on the severity of the contact and the susceptibility of the individual. Also, this plant occasionally causes dermatitis, more so in individuals who are especially susceptible.

During the survey of insect pests of flora of district Pithoragarh situated at 5500' altitude in the Kumaon hills of central Himalaya in 1992, large numbers of caterpillars of two lepidopterous insects, *Aglais kaschmirensis* Kollar (Nymphalidae) and *Arcte coerulea* Guenée (Noctuidae) were observed feeding on the leaves and tender shoots of *Urtica divica* Linn. in the months of July to September.

The caterpillars were collected and reared on the host plant in the laboratory. The detail biology of these insects is given in table 1.

Insects	Average larval period (days)	Average pupal period (days)	Average adult period (days)	Average total life span (days)
<i>A. kaschmirensis</i>	18	9.5	3	30.5
<i>A. coerulea</i>	20	25	5	50

Table 1. Biology of *Aglais kaschmirensis* Linn. and *Arcte coerulea* Decne.

Average total larvae population of *A. kaschmirensis* was recorded at 132 with minimum and maximum variation of 80-210 and 108 with minimum and maximum variation 55-138 of *A. coerulea* per plant. These caterpillars voraciously feed on plants. In natural conditions *A. kaschmirensis* pupates on stems and underneath the leaves whereas *A. coerulea* pupates under the soil, fallen leaves on the ground or in the root zone of the plants. From the available literature it reveals that the reported insects of the present study seem to be the first record of pests on *Urtica divica* Linn. in the Kumaon hills of Central Himalaya.

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References

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A flurry of *Sitotroga cerealella* Olivier (Lep.: Gelechiidae) in Kent

Whilst browsing round a large garden centre at Badgers Mount, north-west Kent, on 10th December 1994 I saw a small child collide with a table containing dried flower arrangements. Although the child appeared undisturbed by this event, the same could not be said for a number of moths lurking in the arrangements who rose as one and dashed in all directions. Embarrassingly net-less and tube-less I could only watch the exodus, but the two or three moths that settled on the low ceiling began running around with a characteristically gelechiid gait. On closer inspection they turned out to be *Sitotroga cerealella*, a cosmopolitan but not often seen pest species.

Although no larval feedings could be found (not unexpected, as the larva can develop within a single grain of, for example, wheat), but it seems probable that the moths emerged from dried cereals used in the arrangements. Sprays of "corn", often dyed with unnatural colours, abounded. Another example of the adaptability of moths!— PAUL SOKOLOFF, 4 Steep Close, Green Street Green, Orpington, Kent BR6 6DS.

Devon moth records

I would like to record three new and unpublished records for Devon: *Pedasia contaminella* Hbn. (Pyrilidae) found commonly on Dawlish Warren on 6th, 8th and 23rd August 1994; *Mythimna obsoleta* Hbn. (Noctuidae) previously recorded by B. Henwood at Colyton and A. Spalding at Slapton (both Devon localities) – recorded in numbers by myself at Exminster Marshes on 26.v and 19.vi.1994, where it appears to be breeding; *Arenostola phragmitidis* Hbn. (Noctuidae) previously recorded in the 1980s and several noted at Dawlish Warren 16.vii.1994, presumably a breeding colony. This species has been seen at Berryhead by B. Henwood and R.J. Heckford, 27.vii.1990; Colyton 1.viii.1982; Abbotskerswell 4.viii.1994.

A species recorded and reported before, although not confirmed as a breeding species, is the noctuid *Earias clorana*. This moth is very common on Dawlish Warren, being noted on 15.vi and 17.vii.1994.— R. McCORMICK, 36 Paradise Road, Teignmouth, Devon TQ14 8NR.